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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE 1416TH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 8 July 1993, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. LOHIA (Papua New Guinea)

- Reports of the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance
  - Question of Pitcairn
  - Question of St. Helena
  - Questions of American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Guam, Montserrat, Tokelau, Turks and Caicos Islands and United States Virgin Islands
  - Question of dissemination of information on decolonization

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- Question of the United States Virgin Islands

  Hearing of the representative of the Governor of the United States Virgin Islands

- Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations

- Programme of work

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

REPORTS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SMALL TERRITORIES, PETITIONS, INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

QUESTION OF PITCAIRN (A/AC.109/L.1799)

QUESTION OF ST. HELENA (A/AC.109/L.1800)

QUESTIONS OF AMERICAN SAMOA, ANGUILLA, BERMUDA, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS, CAYMAN ISLANDS, GUAM, MONTSERRAT, TOKELAU, TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS AND UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS (A/AC.109/L.1796)

QUESTION OF DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ON DECOLONIZATION (A/AC.109/L.1797)

The CHAIRMAN: I call on the Rapporteur of the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance, who will introduce that Subcommittee's reports.

Mr. LOTFI HORMOZABADI (Islamic Republic of Iran), Rapporteur of the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance: I have the honour, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance, to introduce to the Special Committee the reports of the Subcommittee on the agenda items allocated to it during the current session. The reports are as follows.

First, the report of the Subcommittee on the Territory of Pitcairn is contained in document A/AC.109/L.1799. The Subcommittee considered this Territory on 29 April, 4 May and 29 June 1993. On 29 June 1993 it adopted by consensus a draft decision on the Territory, which is inscribed in section C of the document.

Secondly, the report of the Subcommittee on the question of St. Helena is contained in document A/AC.109/L.1800. The Subcommittee considered this Territory on 1 and 29 June 1993 and adopted by consensus a draft decision on the Territory on 29 June 1993. In this regard, one delegation expressed a reservation.

(Mr. Lotfi Hormozabadi,
Islamic Republic of Iran)

Thirdly, the report on the question of dissemination of information on decolonization is contained in document A/AC.109/L.1797. This report has been divided into an introduction and four sections. Section I covers the consultations with the representative of the Department of Public Information; section II is allocated to the consultations with the representative of the Department of Political Affairs; section III covers the issue of the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of All Colonial Territories, as well as Those in South Africa, Fighting for Freedom, Independence and Human Rights; and section IV covers the conclusions and recommendations.

The question of dissemination of information on decolonization was considered by the Subcommittee on 11, 13, 25 and 27 May 1993; the Subcommittee adopted the report by consensus.

Fourthly, the report on the questions of American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Guam, Montserrat, Tokelau, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the United States Virgin Islands is in document A/AC.109/L.1796. The text of the consolidated draft resolution on all those Territories is contained in part A of the draft consolidated resolution in that document, and part B contains separate draft resolutions on each of them. The Subcommittee adopted the report on 29 June 1993 by consensus.

These conclusions and recommendations were achieved during consultations that took place at a number of formal and informal meetings. I hope that the Special Committee of 24 will adopt the reports.

QUESTION OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

The CHAIRMAN: I wish to inform members that I have received a request from Mr. Carlyle Corbin, representative of the Governor of the United States Virgin Islands, to make a statement at this stage. Subject to members' consent and in accordance with standing procedure, I suggest that the Committee invite him to make a statement.

It was so decided.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Corbin took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Mr. Corbin to address the Committee.

Mr. CORBIN: On behalf of Governor Alexander A. Farrelly of the United States Virgin Islands, I appreciate this opportunity to present our Government's statement to the Committee.

We have had an opportunity to review the report of the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance, and in particular the consolidated text, and congratulate the Subcommittee, its Bureau and, in particular, the Rapporteur, who has just introduced the report of the activities of the Subcommittee. At this stage, we would wish to make just a few comments on the report.

My Government generally endorses the language of the preambular part of the general section of the consolidated draft resolution. However, we feel that its final paragraph could be strengthened. That paragraph recalls the conclusions and recommendations adopted and the positions taken by the territorial Governments at the United Nations regional seminar on decolonization. However, simply recalling those recommendations and the positions of the peoples of the Territories concerned does not facilitate action.

(Mr. Corbin)

Since the Committee adopts the reports of these seminars, and therefore adopts their conclusions and recommendations, it would seem that some attempt should be made to integrate these key recommendations into the report of the Special Committee if the draft resolution is to be reflective of the concerns expressed by the people themselves. Alternatively, the Committee may wish to consider approving a separate draft resolution outlining these seminar recommendations.

In this vein, we recall a key recommendation of the decolonization seminar held in Grenada last December, and referred to in our statement to the Subcommittee this year. This recommendation called for the establishment of a mechanism to represent the interests and to articulate the needs of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, in the form of an expert group comprised of representatives of these Territories to advise the Special Committee and the Secretary-General on the most effective way to carry out the mandate of the United Nations to complete the decolonization process by the end of the century. Who else but the people themselves should know how this process should proceed?

The proposal for an expert group was endorsed by the representatives of the Pacific Non-Self-Governing Territories at the Pacific regional seminar, held in Papua New Guinea last month, and was also included as a recommendation in the report of that seminar. Yes, an expert group is an innovative idea, not necessarily consistent with the ordinary order of business, and perhaps, as a result, is one that seems not to have been seriously considered by the Committee so far.

When this expert-group idea was proposed to the Working Group of the Subcommittee earlier this year, for example, it was not approved, but is not

(Mr. Corbin)

innovation required if we are successfully to carry out the mandate to eradicate colonialism by the year 2000? My Government would argue that without new measures of this nature, if we merely continue to approve resolutions, with no mechanisms to monitor their implementation, we will not meet our goal by the year 2000. We therefore call once again for this expert group to be considered. This could be achieved by amending the Plan of Action of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, and could be funded from existing budgetary resources.

Most of the Non-Self-Governing Territories are small island developing countries. The work of the Subcommittee and the situation of the small Territories should now be elevated to the level of the Special Committee, where we are currently given only a few short days of consideration.

Consideration should also be given to the scheduling of the meetings of the Special Committee. Currently, the Caribbean Community Heads of Government are meeting in the Bahamas; four of the seven Caribbean Non-Self-Governing Territories are represented there and therefore cannot be here at these few days of the Special Committee's session.

My Government generally endorses the language of the operative paragraphs of the general part of the consolidated draft resolution, and wishes to commend the Subcommittee for its continued emphasis on relevant issues in our Territories. We note, however, that the final paragraph, as in the case of last year's consolidated resolution, calls for a report to the General Assembly on

"the most suitable steps to be taken to enable the populations of those Territories to exercise their right to self-determination".

(Mr. Corbin)

Have these reports been prepared? We would be most interested in knowing which "suitable steps" are being recommended for us, but perhaps the absence of the reports illustrates that the Special Committee may not be in the best position to prepare them. Should not such reports be prepared by experts from the Territories themselves?

Mr. Chairman, permit me a few comments on the United States Virgin Islands section of the report. We again commend the Subcommittee on the detail and relevance of this section, which identifies some of the key issues facing the United States Virgin Islands, including the insurance crisis, the long-standing concern over the return of Water Island to the territorial Government, steps taken by our Government to acquire St. Thomas Harbour, the need for the Territory to widen its participation in regional organizations and the need for budgetary resources for this purpose.

A few updates on the United States Virgin Islands draft resolution are in order.

(Mr. Corbin)

We note that the draft resolution accurately reflects the consultative nature of the referendum and the concerns in the Territory over voter residency requirements, the availability of information and the multiplicity of the political options.

Regarding the non-binding nature of the political status referendum scheduled for September this year, it is to be emphasized that, since there is no commitment on the part of the administering Power to accept the results, some in our Territory have minimized the referendum's importance. We are concerned that this may affect voter participation.

There is also the question of the cost of the referendum. Due to the severe budgetary constraints on our Government - which is financing 100 per cent of the referendum process - our Status Commission has had to request our Legislature to change the four referendum dates from regular election dates, which are usually holidays, to days that are not holidays. This proposal was made because four electoral holidays were considered too costly in terms of lost time of Government workers.

This is, however, another factor that could potentially impact voter turnout. Relevant United Nations resolutions can be recalled that ask for support for the Territory to facilitate political education programmes. Such assistance has never been provided, however, and our Government has had to finance the process from our limited local resources, which have proved insufficient. Therefore, such cost-saving measures had to be recommended, a situation that could cause a further negative impact on the number of people who vote.

It is also our custom to utilize the neighbourhood schools to conduct elections. But since the proposal calls for the referendums to be conducted

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on regular business days, the school buildings would not be available, since the students would be using them. Therefore, alternative polling sites would have to be identified - an additional factor that could erode voter participation, since our people are accustomed to the school buildings as the traditional polling places.

As this is the first such political status referendum in our history, these are issues that we have not had to deal with before. A visiting mission to observe these and other aspects of the political education process would have been able to advise us. But, as the Committee is aware, my Government's request for a visiting mission was not approved. It is our hope that the new Government of the administering Power will understand our dilemma and permit a visiting mission to come to the Territory in advance of our referendum process. The United Nations experience in referendums world wide would prove invaluable to us. Missions of the Trusteeship Council are routinely sent to Palau. Is our political development not considered as important?

The United States Virgin Islands draft resolution also refers to concerns in the Territory regarding the length of the residency requirement for voting in the referendum - yet another issue that could significantly affect the legitimacy of the referendum.

Our Government has made several requests to this Committee over the years for information on voter residency requirements in other Non-Self-Governing Territories under the Committee's purview. In the context of this request, our Government has had to initiate an analysis, which has not been completed because of a lack of resources.

(Mr. Corbin)

One of the points that we have attempted to clarify in this connection is the applicability of the Declaration on decolonization to our Territory, since the General Assembly routinely confirms that this Declaration applies to us. This is particularly relevant when one examines the transfer-of-powers doctrine in the Declaration. Has such a transfer taken place in other Territories in advance of an act of self-determination? How was it carried out? These continue to be lingering concerns in our community. We again ask the United Nations to assist us in our analysis of this issue if our referendum process is ever to be successful.

We appreciate the call in the consolidated text for the transfer of Water Island, the fourth largest of the Virgin Islands, to the territorial Government. The reuniting of all the islands of our Territory is long overdue. We are sure that this Committee would recognize that the availability of land is of critical importance to our Territory, particularly when one recalls that the third most densely populated country in all of Latin America and the Caribbean is the United States Virgin Islands. We applaud the Committee's courage in approving this section and trust that the Fourth Committee will concur with this necessary action.

We are also pleased with the call for assistance from all financial organizations of the United Nations system in the acquisition of the St. Thomas Harbour, in the capital of the Territory. In this regard, we hereby report that our Government, through a series of internal financial mechanisms, completed several weeks ago the acquisition of the stock of the company that previously owned the harbour, in the amount of $48 million. We appreciate the expression of support on this matter as contained in the report

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of the Subcommittee, and request that the Special Committee, in consultation with the territorial Government, identify the relevant offices of the United Nations system where the support called for can be made available to us.

The draft resolution also calls for the participation of our Territory in regional and other international organizations, but, as is also indicated, we have been unable, for financial reasons, to participate in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization as observers. In fact, this matter of resources has become a major impediment to Non-Self-Governing Territory participation in international activities, in particular those of the United Nations.

After obtaining observer status in many conferences and other activities of the United Nations, few of our Governments are able to attend without the provision of external resources. It is our view, therefore, that under the mandate of the agenda item "Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by the specialized agencies and the international organizations associated with the United Nations," the Special Committee could assist our Territories in identifying the resources from the United Nations system so that we can participate in programmes and activities of the system that become available to us. Otherwise, the adoption of resolutions on this question is not translated into action.

In this connection, the Ministers of the Caribbean Cooperation and Development Committee adopted a resolution at its fourteenth session, held in St. George's, Grenada, in December 1992, calling for consultations with the Chairman of the Special Committee with the aim of assisting the Non-Self-Governing Territories of the Caribbean in identifying resources to

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continue their ongoing examination of United Nations programmes and activities. The work already under way by this regional group has assisted Non-Self-Governing Territories in both the Caribbean and the Pacific in obtaining observer status in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held last year in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States - the regional technical meeting for the Pacific was held in May in Vanuatu, and the Caribbean regional technical meeting is scheduled for next week in Trinidad and Tobago; and the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development.

(Mr. Corbin)

Our Territories have now been granted, or are in the process of securing, observer status for the latter two organizations and activities of the system, and we would appreciated any assistance this Committee could provide with regard to ensuring maximum participation by our Territories in those activities.

In that regard, the consultations with the Chairman of the Special Committee called for in the resolution adopted by the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee should be held at the earliest possible time so as to ensure that the work of our regional group, in consultation with our counterpart Pacific groups, can continue to the benefit of all Non-Self-Governing Territories under the review of the Special Committee.

In conclusion, we wish once again to thank you personally, Mr. Chairman, for your very strong efforts in the process of the self-determination of our Territories.

We are available to answer any questions members may have.

The CHAIRMAN: It appears that no member of the Special Committee wishes to make comments or put questions to Mr. Corbin. On behalf of the Special Committee I wish to thank Mr. Corbin for the information he has presented to the Special Committee. The views he expressed will be noted and taken into account in connection with the consideration of the relevant draft resolutions and decisions.

Mr. Corbin withdrew.

The CHAIRMAN: The Special Committee will now take up the various reports of the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance.

(The Chairman)

We turn first to the report relating to Pitcairn (A/AC.109/L.1799). It appears that there are no comments at this stage. I suggest that members study the document; the Committee will continue consideration of the report at the next meeting with a view to taking action on it.

The Committee will next take up the report relating to St. Helena (A/AC.109/L.1800). It appears that there are no comments at this stage. The Committee will continue consideration of the report at the next meeting with a view to taking action on it.

The Committee will next take up the report relating to the 10 Territories of American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Guam, Montserrat, Tokelau, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the United States Virgin Islands (A/AC.109/L.1796). It appears that there are no comments at this stage. The Committee will continue consideration of the report at its next meeting with a view to taking action on it.

The Committee will next take up the report relating to the question of dissemination of information on decolonization (A/AC.109/L.1797). It appears that there are no comments at this stage. The Committee will continue consideration of the report at the next meeting with a view to taking action on it.

INFORMATION FROM NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES TRANSMITTED UNDER ARTICLE 73 e OF THE CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS (A/AC.109/1160 AND A/AC.109/L.1798)

The CHAIRMAN: I wish to draw the attention of members to the report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.109/1160). Members also have before them document A/AC.109/L.1798, which contains the text of a draft resolution on this question, prepared by the Chairman.

(The Chairman)

It appears that there are no comments at this stage. The Committee will continue consideration of this item at the next meeting with a view to taking action on the draft resolution.

PROGRAMME OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN: The next meeting will be held on Monday, 12 July, at 10 a.m., when the Rapporteur of the Pacific Regional Seminar will introduce the report of the Seminar.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.